

Good afternoon members of the NJ Board of Education. My name is Dr. Lauren Hill; I work as a Project Director for the Education Law Center – Camden Initiative. I requested an opportunity to speak today in opposition to the proposals released last Spring in the NJ Steps report for the following reasons:

- While increasing student success and graduation outcomes are shared goals among all parties, the implementation of additional high-states tests may reduce the number of students who achieve these outcomes. In Camden, we already have an exceptionally high dropout rate. Students and educators will need to receive extensive preparatory coursework and activities before the onset of these new requirements at the high school level. Middle school curricula and educators' professional development must be examined and aligned to ensure students and educators are appropriately prepared to meet the goals of the NJ High School Redesign Proposal.
- We need more data regarding ninth students' performance in Algebra I and Biology I before this high stakes initiative is implemented. Such data would provide evidence of students' ability to successfully complete these courses. Further, gathering more data about the challenges involved in implementing these recommendations would help to determine strategies for creating and implementing student enrichment and tutoring programs. This information is critical to enhancing students' success.
- In Camden, we have growing numbers of special education students at the secondary level. For the 2006-07 school year, about 25% of our middle school students had Individualized Education Programs, and 24% of the students enrolled in our traditional high schools had Individualized Education Programs. The NJ Steps Proposal does not clearly present the needed resources and instructional implications for preparing special needs students for these new testing requirements.
- Many of our schools lack adequate facilities to appropriately deliver instruction, especially in the area of lab-based sciences. Our district, like many schools districts in poor disadvantaged communities lack the capacity to upgrade classrooms and laboratories to meet this goal. The NJ Steps proposals do not describe how the gap between two or more years of mandated lab science and current facilities needs will be closed.

Our district has experienced deep budget cuts in light of the School Funding Reform Act of 2008, causing both staff and programs losses that impact students' classroom experience. It would seem arduous and unreasonable for district officials and educators to implement the additional requirements outlined in the Proposal without consideration for fiscal constraints. Before imposing penalties on students we need a credible study of the staff, professional development, facilities, and other costs required to meet these proposed standards.

- Lastly, we need to sustain multiple methods to support student competence and meet high school graduation standards to ensure we don't leave even more young people behind as we look to reform secondary education throughout our State.



In closing, NJ Board of Education members I urge that you continue to vet the se proposed recommendations to address the concerns raised by stakeholders statewide, who like yourselves want to a embrace opportunities for secondary reform that allows us to ensure the best prepared students and helps to produce contributing members of our State.

Thank you,

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